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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002026

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S CYPRUS ENDGAME

U) Classified by A/DCM Scot Marciel, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Assuming an April 24 approval by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots, Turkey's AKP government is poised to play out its Cyprus endgame with the military, President Sezer, and the Parliament. In a stormy April 5 meeting of Turkey's National Security Council (NSC), the military and President Sezer expressed deep concern about whether the EU will follow through on Verheugen's promises to make a Cyprus agreement primary law. The UK is working with the EU to prepare a concrete response to Turkish concerns. If primary law concerns are met, the AKP government parliamentary majority appears sufficient to approve the agreement despite possible defections among nationalistic deputies. President Sezer must approve the agreement; there is a danger he may not approve absent further guarantees on making the agreement primary law. The GOT hopes for a clear message of financial support from the April 15 pre-donors conference to answer concerns about displaced Turkish Cypriots. Turkish public opinion on the agreement is generally positive, but there is a reservoir of permanent opposition. End Summary.

2. (C) Despite AKP's big win in the March 28 municipal elections, Erdogan faces the tough political challenge of gaining Turkish acceptance of the draft Cyprus settlement. This is a challenge with immediate ramifications for the strength of his prime ministership and leadership of the party. He has undertaken -- and was unambiguously stuck with full responsibility by the military in the April 5 NSC meeting -- to sell the settlement to his AKP parliamentary group and to work for acceptance by the Turkish Cypriots.

NSC Stormy Over Primary Law

3. (C) After Burgenstock, Turkey's National Security Council (NSC) discussed Cyprus on April 1 and again on April 5. The NSC statement following the April 5 meeting was pointed, declaring that the agreement does not meet all Turkey's demands, "although it has some positive points." The statement laid responsibility for implementing the agreement, including making it primary law, squarely on the AKP government.

4. (C) On April 6, MFA U/S Ziyal told UK Ambassador Westmacott that the April 5 meeting was difficult and stormy, according to what Westmacott relayed to Ambassador Edelman. Although the military's earlier redlines had been met and they could not point to deficiencies in the agreement, military reps on the NSC expressed deep concern over whether the EU would follow through on Verheugen's promises to make the agreement primary law. Westmacott told Ambassador Edelman that London is working with the EU to prepare something more concrete to meet Turkish concerns; Westmacott sees no need for specific USG action at this point.

5. (C) MFA Northeastern Mediterranean Affairs DDG Eguz corroborated Ziyal's account of the April 5 meeting. Eguz said both President Sezer and the military focused on the primary law issue, and also the fate of TCs who will be displaced by the agreement. Like Ziyal, Eguz expressed serious concern about the primary law issue. Eguz thinks it "self-evident" that the Greek Parliament will approve making the agreement primary law if the GCs have passed the referendum. However, he emphasized that some in the NSC deeply mistrust Verheugen's guarantees and want to see an "irreversible" act toward making the agreement primary law.

6. (C) On the issue of displaced TCs, Eguz said the GOT needs a clear message of financial support from the April 15 pre-donors' conference.

Parliament

7. (C) If the agreement passes both referenda and primary law concerns are met, AKP's solid parliamentary majority (367

of 550 deputies) currently appears sufficient to approve the agreement. Approval will require a simple majority of those present. Abstentions will in effect count as votes against. DDG Eguz expects the agreement to go to Parliament April 25 or 26.

18. (C) AKP vice chairman for policy Dengir Firat told us April 2 that AKP will not adopt a group decision requiring parliamentarians to vote in favor. PM Erdogan remains personally opposed to that approach and will instead seek to "convince" parliamentarians. In this regard Erdogan is in firm control of the party and is willing to expend enormous political capital to secure a settlement. Most AKP parliamentarians know little about the details of the agreement and look to Erdogan for leadership. According to Firat, AKP will prevent deputies opposed to the agreement from speaking out against it or campaigning against it either in Turkey or on the island. Main opposition CHP, drubbed in Turkey's March 28 municipal elections, is unlikely to mount an effective opposition campaign outside of its own 175 deputies.

19. (C) Nevertheless, Firat conceded there may well be defections from AKP, mostly among parliamentarians with roots in the ultra-nationalist MHP. Firat professes not to be worried that this will cut significantly into AKP's majority. Ex-parliamentarian Hasim Hasimi and prominent anti-Cyprus solution columnist and professor Hasan Unal both estimate the number of MHP-origin AKP deputies at more than 50.

10. (C) Hasimi doubts that many will defect in the face of strong leadership from Erdogan. If Erdogan requires an open vote similar to the October 7 vote on Turkish troop deployment to Iraq, AKP parliamentarians will have to look the PM in the eye and openly oppose one of the biggest efforts of his political career. Still, Unal points out that MHP's ten-plus percent showing in the March 28 elections shows MHP might again enter Parliament in a future general election. He speculated, with some wishful thinking, that MHP-oriented deputies might seek to defect and form an MHP parliamentary group if they want to defy Erdogan.

Sezer Might Not Approve Absent Steps on Primary Law

11. (C) If Parliament approves, President Sezer has to sign or reject the agreement by April 29. Sezer's focus thus far has been the primary law issue. DDG Eguz worries there is a "real danger" Sezer may not approve the agreement absent some further "irreversible" step from the Council on the primary law issue.

12. (C) If Sezer approves the agreement, prospects for a successful court challenge appear weak: under Article 90 of Turkey's Constitution, "international agreements" cannot be challenged on a constitutional basis.

Public Opinion

13. (U) In the immediate aftermath of Burgenstock, most Turkish media portrayed the agreement as meeting Turkey's essential demands. Some media went even further, gloating about a Turkish "victory" over the Greek Cypriots. Even nationalist *Turkiye* newspaper's April 2 headline trumpeted "The World Sees Cyprus Talks in Switzerland as a Victory for the Turks." Subsequent media coverage has been more sober, pointing out both pluses and minuses of the plan for Turkey.

14. (U) Turkish public opinion, which a few weeks ago was negative on the Annan Plan, was swinging around in favor of an Annan Plan-based solution before the agreement. Poll numbers on an Annan Plan-based solution have climbed steadily over the last four months. A November 2003 poll showed 16% for, 53% against, 30% undecided; by January, the numbers were up to 23% for, 39% against, 38% undecided. By March, polls showed 47% of the public in favor of an Annan Plan-based solution, 38% against, 14% undecided. However, the same March poll yielded a contradictory result when respondents were asked about the GOT handling of Cyprus policy: while 57% of AK's supporters approved, only 38% of the overall public approved, versus 49% disapproval and 13% undecided.

15. (C) AKP is currently Turkey's best-organized party, and the rank and file, like its parliamentarians, will follow Erdogan's lead. However, Firat estimates that AKP's Cyprus stance cost it 5%-6% in the municipal elections. Unal attributes MHP's increased voting percentage (10.47% in March, compared to 8.36% in November 2003 general elections) to AKP's MHP-origin voters defecting over displeasure about

Cyprus.

Denktash's "No" Campaign

116. (C) Rauf Denktash is in the middle of a "no" campaign in Turkey, including a vintage stem-winder speech to a friendly audience in Bursa and meetings with President Sezer and PM Erdogan. The campaign has aroused those already opposed to any agreement, but we see no evidence thus far that Denktash has made inroads beyond that. Our MFA contacts are not worried the Denktash campaign will undo Ankara's internal consensus.

Comment

117. (C) EU action along the lines of the April 2 paper Ziyal passed to Ambassador Edelman (e-mailed to the Department and Embassy Nicosia April 7) is now more important than ever to keeping Ankara's internal consensus together. The April 5 NSC meeting reveals the fissure that could develop -- the AK government on one side, the military and President on the other -- if this concern goes unmet.

118. (C) In this regard, Erdogan must (1) manage the calculated public ambivalence of the Turkish military; (2) blunt the effect of Denktash's anti-settlement media campaign; (3) keep careful tabs on the thinking of narrowly legalistic President Sezer; and (4) control the temptation for major AK figures like Parliamentary Speaker Arinc and Deputy PM Sener to use the Cyprus issue for their own political ambitions. However, sharing Erdogan's self-confidence, AKP contacts, from Firat to various other deputies, are convinced Erdogan will have no trouble convincing his parliamentary group to support ratification of an affirmative TC referendum; we will be making the rounds of our party contacts to gauge the effectiveness of Erdogan's forcefully delivered April 6 parliamentary group speech and the pro-settlement booklet AKP circulated to its deputies.
EDELMAN